

The Chevy Houses of Garrett Park

Chevy house



(Photo: 10937 Montrose Avenue by Bert Zbar, 2010)

Of the variety of architectural types found on the streets of Garrett Park, the Chevy Houses are among the most interesting, and are virtually unique to this Town. The 39 Chevy Houses, built between 1924 and 1926, represent the second major period of development in Garrett Park after the original Victorian cottages. The development strategy behind the Chevy Houses was completely different from the ideas of the original investors in Garrett Park. These small houses were intended to appeal to the first time home owner, not the established upper middle class. And instead of riding the train into the city for employment, the owners of the Chevy Houses were expected to be automobile commuters.

The Chevy House development was the brainchild of a group of retired military officers, Maj. H.C. Maddux, Brig. Gen. R.C. Marshall, Col. James A. Moss and Lt. Com. C. K. Mallory. Their firm Maddux, Marshall, Mallory and Moss was also known as the 4-M's. They first developed the Battery Park neighborhood in Bethesda, and later went on to own hotels and apartments in Washington. They were so successful that the firm was featured in a special section of the Washington Post in 1926.

The 4-M Company came to Garrett Park in 1924. They bought up most of the vacant lots that had been owned by the Metropolitan Investment and Building Company when it dissolved in 1910. In a glossy brochure describing Garrett Park as an environment fit for millionaires the 4-M Company extolled the moral, civic and financial merits of home ownership. They claimed to be one of the first companies to build for, and directly market to, first time home owners. The package that they offered consisted of a bungalow home, a built-in radio (for fireside entertainment), and transportation in the form of a Chevrolet in the option garage. All could be bundled into a single payment the monthly amount depended on the model of Chevy the buyer chose.

When the first two small Chevy Houses were erected on Argyle Avenue, Town residents became alarmed by their modest size. Representatives of 4-M met with the Town Council and agreed to build larger versions of the Chevy House than those initially advertised and to leave an empty lot between the houses to reduce density.

The Chevy Houses, as designed by 4-M architect Russell O. Kluge, were similar in plan. The compact 830-square foot interior consisted of a living room with fireplace and dining nook. The small kitchen had a glass-fronted dresser for storage, an oil range, and a combination sink and laundry tray. Two bedrooms and a bath opened off a small hall, and some models included a 96-square foot rear sleeping porch. Space was maximized by the use of built-ins--a murphy bed in the living room, table and benches in the dining nook, medicine/linen cabinet in the bathroom. Plaster walls were papered and trim was stained wood. There were electric light fixtures in each room and a single utility outlet in the living room, and, of course, the built-in radio. The full basement had hollow-tile walls and cement floor.

On the exterior, the Chevy Houses share certain characteristics. The most prominent and distinguishing feature is a handsome gabled porch which gives the small homes a sense of presence on the street. They also feature an end chimney of exposed brickwork with a gabled bump-out behind it for the dining nook. The dining nook contains a single window. The walls are sheathed in German siding. The Chevies are given variety in appearance by the use of four configurations of porch and roof styles which are described below. Although concentrated on Clermont Place, Clermont Avenue, and Montrose Avenue, the Chevies were built all over Town. Because of varied topography, the height of porch foundation piers and the number of steps vary. Some porches appear to have been enclosed with simple railings while others were not. Houses built on steep terrain also have basement walls exposed allowing for more basement windows and doors.

Although there are no building permits for most of the Chevy Houses, tax records show that the lots on which they stand were improved by 1926. This means that most of the Chevy Houses were probably built in 1925. The development of the Chevies doubled the number of houses in Garrett Park and brought about a number of changes in the sleepy town: zoning laws were revised; street signs were erected and houses were assigned numbers; a new two-room school was built. Most important, public water and sewer finally came to Garrett Park. The Chevy House development might have completely transformed the Town had it not been for the looming financial crisis which was affecting the building industry by 1927. 4-M went bankrupt and a number of the Chevy Houses bounced through investors, finance companies and tax sales before they found permanent owners. All of the original Chevy Houses still survive in 2010 although most have been expanded and some altered beyond recognition. They remain one of the most visible and defining house types in Garrett Park.

Most of the Chevy Houses erected by the 4-M Company fall into one of the following four categories.

Open-Pediment Style



Open Pediment Chevy House

(Photo: 10935 Montrose Avenue by Bert Zbar, 2010)

The most prevalent exterior Chevy House arrangement features a simple gable roof on the main house and a gabled porch with open pediment. The porch is supported by two closely spaced columns on each side. The gable is framed by a cornice that returns above the porch columns. The house has four bays and the porch covers the two left-hand bays consisting of a window and an 15-pane glass door. The other two bays are windows that were originally shuttered. All windows are double hung with six panes in the upper sash and one in the lower. These door and window styles are common to all Chevy Houses.

There appears to be a variant on this style which features a porch with Closed-Pediment. The two houses that were built immediately after the 4-M Company came to an agreement with the Town to erect larger house were those at 11121 Rokeby Avenue and 4701 Clyde Avenue. A picture of 11121 Rokeby published in the 1970s shows a porch that appears to be original. It is interesting to note that the porch of this house resembled the ones on the original Argyle Avenue Chevy Houses. It has a closed triangular pediment supported by two columns at each corner. It is similar to the porch style shown on the Woodbine model in the 4-M Company's 1924 brochure. It is possible that the house at 4701 Clyde or which a permit was issued at the same time had

a similar porch. The house at 4424 Strathmore also has a closed pediment porch, but it is not known if that feature is original or an alteration.

Hipped Roof Style



Hipped Roof Chevy house
(Photo: 10915 Clermont Avenue by Bert Zbar, 2010)

This is also a four bay house with the gabled porch covering a door and window bay on the left side of the facade. On this style, the porch gable is closed and has a small vent at the peak. The porch roof is supported on two heavy piers. Although usually sheathed with German siding, there is one house in town that has rustic shingles on the walls and porch piers that may have been an alternate covering. This porch type is always combined with a hipped roof covering the main house. This roof consists of four slopes that meet at a small central ridge. An intersecting gable roof covers the dining nook projection behind the chimney.

Clipped Gable Style



Clipped Gable Chevy house

(Photo: 10909 Montrose Avenue by Vickie Baily, 2010)

This is also a four bay house with the gabled porch located on the left side of the facade. The gable roof of the main house is clipped, creating a small triangular section at either end of the ridge and resulting in an interesting configuration when seen from the side. The porch style that was combined with this roof form has a closed gable with applied vertical boards that create a kind of half-timbered effect. Two large square piers support each corner of the porch roof. Between them are heavy rounded brackets.

Barrel Vaulted Style



Barrel Vaulted Chevy house

(Photo: 4517 Clermont Place by Bert Zbar, 2010)

This Chevy House also has a simple gable roof on the main house. Its gabled porch, however, is centered on the facade and features a graceful barrel vault. The gable is outlined with a cornice that returns to the base of the vault and is supported by two widely spaced columns on each side of the steps. This house usually has only three bays on the front, with only a door under the porch, and a window on either side. (Is it smaller?)

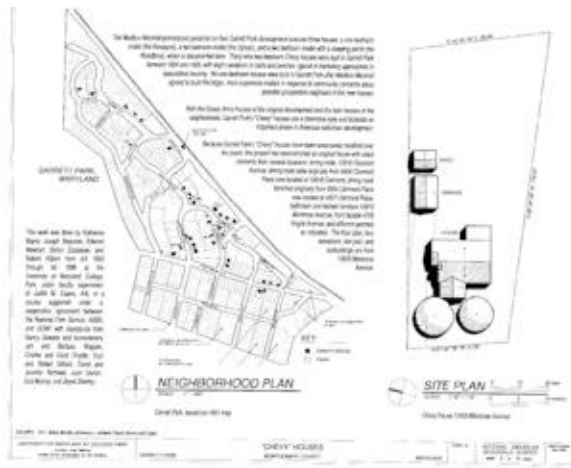
Chevy House Garages

One of the marketing strategies for selling the Chevy Houses was the offer of an optional garage and purchase of one of six models of Chevrolet cars to park in it. The garages were a simple rectangular structure with low gable roof. The car entered through a large door with two wooden leaves in one end of the building. On the long side of the garage nearest the house were two windows and a door. A number of the Chevy Houses never had garages. Of those that did, many of the garages grew dilapidated and were demolished or were removed when houses were expanded. At approximately 225 sq. ft., they were not big enough for the larger cars of the mid-20th century. At least six Chevy House garages remain in Garrett Park. They can be found at 10912, 10933, 10935, and 10937 Montrose Avenue, 10903 Kenilworth Avenue, and 11115 Rokeby Avenue.

Documentation for the Historic American Buildings Survey

Between 1993 and 1996, students in the School of Architecture at the University of Maryland prepared a 14-sheet set of drawings of the Chevy Houses of Garrett Park using the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey. These drawings include typical floor plans and elevations; examples of the four types of porches; and details of dining nook furniture, bathroom fixtures, and kitchen dresser.

Map showing location of Chevy houses



Following is a list of addresses for Garrett Park's Chevy Houses:

4705 Argyle Ave.

4707 Argyle Ave.

10903 Clermont Ave.

10905 Clermont Ave.

10913 Clermont Ave.

10914 Clermont Ave.

10915 Clermont Ave.

10918 Clermont Ave.

10919 Clermont Ave.

10922 Clermont Ave.

10926 Clermont Ave.

10930 Clermont Ave.

4502 Clermont Pl.

4504 Clermont Pl.

4513 Clermont Pl.

4517 Clermont Pl.

4701 Clyde Ave.

10903 Kenilworth Ave.

11307 Kenilworth Ave.

10905 Montrose Ave.

10909 Montrose Ave.

10910 Montrose Ave.

10912 Montrose Ave.

10915 Montrose Ave.

10919 Montrose Ave.

10933 Montrose Ave.

10935 Montrose Ave.

10937 Montrose Ave.

10941 Montrose Ave.

10900 Raleigh Ave.

10904 Raleigh Ave.

11010 Rokeby Ave.

11111 Rokeby Ave.

11115 Rokeby Ave.

11121 Rokeby Ave.

4422 Strathmore Ave.

4423 Strathmore Ave.

4424 Strathmore Ave.

4709 Strathmore Ave.